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AUTHOR Gibson, Deborah
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ABSTRACT

A student-centered noncredit writing course for students of English as a second language, designed to alleviate the problems of diverse class membership, consists of a series of composition assignments with topics determined by class interests and composition length determined by the student. The entire class participates in prewriting activities; first drafts are prepared individually and critiqued by fellow students in pairs or small groups. The compositions are then rewritten and submitted. While this assignment is being checked by the teacher, the class works on handouts based on problems or exemplary items from their writing. If an individual is still having trouble with a particular point, the handouts are supplemented with exercises from composition textbooks. The compositions are returned to students with the successes and problems noted and grammatical errors indicated. The student then rewrites the composition, underlining all changes, and resubmits the work. All additional problems are handled individually, not by handouts, and the class again becomes the audience for the final drafts. Usually work on the first assignment overlaps the prewriting activity for the next assignment. Students keep all drafts, and meet with the instructor two or three times during the course for individual analysis of their work. (MSE)

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Deborah Gibson
2630 West 7th Avenue
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A STUDENT-CENTERED WRITING CURRICULUM

Teachers of adult non-credit writing courses often encounter a major problem with a fixed course curriculum. There may be students in the class who, at the end of a three-month course (eight hours per week), want to continue to study writing but do not wish to repeat the curriculum, while the bulk of the class consists of students taking the course for the first time. Some students might even register in a course of this kind for three sessions running. To complicate matters, the student population may be very mixed in other ways, varying from lower intermediate to very advanced, and including both those bound for English-speaking universities (with or without degrees from their countries) and those taking the course for general language improvement, and, of course, those who love to write and those who do not.

One solution to this problem is to base the course curriculum and content on the students' work, on what they produce in writing. Varying student needs are then met by a curriculum which changes from session to session and which is adaptable to other student populations, whether graded in credit courses or not.

The goals of the writing course are to improve the students' grammar, their ability to write long complex sentences, their vocabulary, and organization (including good introductions and conclusions), and also to work on elements of style. Techniques of peer critiquing, which encourage the students to write for an audience other than the teacher (thereby encouraging careful work and improving handwriting) are used in pre-writing sessions as well as in editing and rewriting. In each session the students assemble a book of their favorite work, including addresses and an autograph page; this pleases the students as well as producing work which has been rewritten to a publishable level.

In brief, the course curriculum (to be described in detail below) is a series of composition assignments, with the topics chosen in part by the class interests, and the length of each paper left up to the student (one-page double-spaced minimum). The whole class participates in the pre-writing activities, first drafts are composed individually, then peer-critiqued in pairs or small groups; compositions are then rewritten and handed in. While this assignment is being checked by the teacher, the whole class works on handouts prepared from their writing. If an

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individual student is still having trouble with a particular point, these handouts are supplemented with exercises from composition textbooks. The compositions are handed back with successes and problems noted, and grammar errors indicated. The student then rewrites, underlining all changes, and hands the work back in for further checking. All additional problems are then dealt with individually, not by handouts. At this point, students again form the reading audience for each other. Usually work on the first assignment now overlaps with the prewriting activity for the next assignment. Students keep all drafts, and two or three times during the course, meet with the instructor one-to-one for an analysis of their work.

Initially, students are provided with stimulating pre-writing experiences that generate ideas for writing. The entire class participates in the experiences, while interpretation is individual. The curriculum design will be illustrated with examples from a topic used several times in each course--the field trip, which produces descriptive writing. These methods also work well for the production of expository writing. Expository writing can be generated by a combination of brainstorming on a topic of interest, clustering, watching videos or student-produced slide shows, or reading newspaper and magazine articles. Field trips (in this case, to various points around the scenic University of British Columbia peninsula), are prepared for prior to the trip with a handout listing possible points of description.

HANDOUT #1 FIELD TRIP- THE VIEWPOINT

Descriptions to consider:

1. Spacial relationships:
   to totem poles
   water
   cliff
   beach
   mountains
   Georgia Strait
   any boats, ships, tugs or barges
   the horizon

2. Sensations:
   sound
   wind
   temperature
   colours
   movement
   memories
   feelings
   images

While on the field trip, students take notes (not writing sentences), requesting needed vocabulary. After 5 to 10 minutes of note-taking, they are asked to compare notes. Some translation inevitably occurs at this point, although it is discouraged subsequently. I also take notes, which I copy and distribute to the students on our return, although a few students have been overly guided by this vocabulary. A short example of my notes is:

HANDOUT #2 THE VIEWPOINT
Distant islands to the west
encircling mountains, blue horizon
small fluffy clouds
small white-caps
soft warm breeze
an occasional cruise
serene place/contrasting sign "danger/cliffs/keep away"

The students write their first draft of their field trip description either for homework or in class the next day. These drafts are then, with the aid of a critics sheet (handout #3) , peer-corrected for organization, content, clarity and style, for everything except grammar errors. Typically, students work in pairs or groups of three , reading each others' work and filling in a critics sheet to aid the writer in rewriting. These sheets should include as many opportunities for praise as for negative criticism. An example of a critics sheet for a field trip is:

HANDOUT #3 CRITICS SHEET
WRITER----------
CRITIC ----------

1. List the verb vocabulary. Don't include 'be', 'have','do','make' or 'get' used as main verbs.

2. Spacial organization:
_____ perfect _____good _____needs improvement

3. List all expressions describing spacial relationships.

4. List analogies and metaphors.

5. Overall feeling, response to the subject:
_____wonderful _____ok _____not mentioned

6. Are there enough details? yes____ no____

When the students have completed these sheets for each other, they return them to the writer, who then decides if any revision is necessary before handing in the draft. On

the handout above, an absence of listed verbs should indicate to the writer that his verb vocabulary is deficient for descriptive prose, while an absence of metaphors can result in a less expressive style. Of course, there is the danger that the critic may be too severe or too forgiviung, or that the writer may disagree with an excellent critic. However, the critics sheets also focus the writers' attention on their own work, as well as providing a larger reading audience and an interactive componment in the classroom.

Upon completion of the rewrite, papers are handed in to the teacher for checking: comments on organization, clarity, vocabulary choice, and for grammar help. Using copy editor's symbols (handout #4), errors in English are indicated, but not, except in the case of some idiom or vocabulary choices, corrected. This handout should contain examples of each type of error.

HANDOUT #4
SYMBOLS FOR ERROR INDICATION
THESE SYMBOLS INDICATE THE TYPE OF ERROR YOU HAVE MADE.

AGT	Agreement of subject and verb
T	verb tense
A/P	active/passive mood
PREP	preposition
ART	article
F	word form
(WO)	word order
SS	sentence structure
V	vocabulary
?	unclear
SP	spelling
(RO)	run-on sentence, comma splice
TR	transition words, links, conjunctions
FRAG	sentence fragment
P	punctuation
^	omission
C	combine these sentences

While the papers are in the teacher's hands, classroom work on the assignment continues, based on the needs of the students in a given assignment. For example, in the field trip composition, there was a need for spacial descriptions, including prepositions such as "beneath" and such idioms as " on the right side of" and " to the right of". Handout #5 is an abbreviated example of the handout to teach these, Prepared from the field trip descriptions.

HANDOUT #5 SPACIAL DESCRIPTIONS

CORRECT THE UNDERLINED PHRASES, IF NECESSARY.

1. West inside UBC is the Anthropology Museum.

2. The seascape, from the hill that is located in front of the Anthropology Museum, was very beautiful.

3. Vancouuver Island is located to the west of Vancouver separate by Georgia Strait to the West Vancouver is Bowen Island, and Burrard Inlet in between of North Vancouver and Vancouver.

The critics sheet required students to identify these structures only in the work of one or two other students but not to correct them, whereas the handout above would contain all examples of space descriptions used by the class, both correct and incorrect. Small groups in class argue the merits of each underlined phrase, followed by a whole-class check of the answers.

Descriptive writing calls for a knowledge of the structure and style of analogies and metaphors, addressed initially by having students identify these on the critics sheet, through reading one or two other students' writing. A further handout made up of all metaphorical uses and misuses from this assignment lends itself to teaching "looks"/"looks like"/"looks as if"/ "feel like" and so on, as well as to helping students identify metaphors by seeing the samples the whole class has produced. On this handout, I include the writers' names, as I consider any use of metaphor to be "good" writing. Any errors here are indicated using the symbols from handout #4.

HANDOUT #6 ANALOGIES AND METAPHORS

1. It looked like a Japanese painting in black and white. (Satoko)

2. When I saw seagulls ^TR were flying above the surface, I feel T like becameT a bird. (Masamitsu)

3. The panoramas were as beautiful as if these were air-brushingF paintings. (Fabiola)

4. The mountains were snow-capsF. (Federico)

5. Seagulls were flying over the boats likeV freighterF.(Jaemin)

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6. Spring has come and every treesF, grassesF, and mountainsF look likeSS lively. (Chako)

7. The misty horizon made me remindSS PREP my hometown and ^SS feelT as if I were to standF in my home's yardF.(Eom)

FINISH THESE SENTENCES:
1. The view made me feel .....
2. The mountains looked .....

Another natural whole-class follow-up to the critics sheet is a lesson on verb vocabulary, as students often seem to have much larger noun and adjective vocabularies. Using either the student-compiled critics sheets or simply choosing good descriptive verbs from my own reading of their work, the following handout teachs verb vocabulary, tense and active/passive mood. Again, students' names could be added to their examples. Students having problems with the tense and mood part of this handout are given supplementary textbook exercises.

HANDOUT #7 GOOD VERBS

FOR THE VERBS BELOW, FIND A SYNONYM, IDENTITY THE TENSE, AND INDICATE WHICH VERBS ARE PASSIVE.

1. we appproached
2. it was clouded
3. I observed
4. ships were drifting
5. the water was undulating
6. totem poles which symbolized
7. a barge was gliding
8. the cliff had been eaten away
9. the wall of the cliff was composed of

General vocabulary improvement is always a possible follow-up to any writing activity, whether descriptive or expository. Had I not compiled a handout to teach verb vocabulary, I might have given students another sheet of their "good" vocabulary items. This handout can either be put together by the students from reading each others' work (the danger here being that a student with a large vocabulary may not include items which others may not know, or vice versa, a student with a small vocabulary may include very commmon words), or it can be put together from my reading of their work. Either way, I deal with repetitions by not including them, which means that the first person to use a given word is credited with it. The handout would look

like the following (from another field trip), with original mistakes in word form corrected but asterisked.

HANDOUT #8 EAST CANYON TRAIL VOCABULARY SHEET

FIND THE MEANINGS OF THE WORDS BELOW FROM THE AUTHORS. IDENTIFY ALL POSSIBLE VERBS, WHETHER OR NOT THEY WERE USED AS VERBS BY THE WRITERS.

GUY-ANNE	PETER
intimacy	peninsula
integrated*	primitive
novice	arduous*
blissful	confiscated
mourning	rustle
gigantic	woodpecker
overwhelming	
immensity	
simultaneously	
sprawled	
landscape	

YOK	SHUKO
improvised	muddy*
penetrate	hardships
predominated*	risks
canopy	swampy
monotony	
fluttered	
perils	
stumbled	
abruptly	
mouldy	

I limit the time spent on this exercise to 20 minutes per class, to avoid overloading their memories with new words. Again, verbs are identified to increase verb vocabulary. Another possibility is to ask students to find all related words; eg. intimacy, intimate; integrated, integration. Having the author of each word list supply the meanings requires knowing how to pronounce the words, so an introductory step is to have the writer read his/her list aloud, and the rest of the class repeating. This of course also increases the number of exposures to each vocabulary item, thereby facilitating acquisition. Occasionally, the class is asked to supply ten new words from a vocabulary sheet--these are put on the board and students are then asked to write as short a story as possible containing all

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ten words. These often humourous stories can then be passed around to be read, or read aloud by each student.

Like the vocabulary handout above, the following handouts (9 and 10) can be used with descriptive or expository prose samples. After each writing assignment has been handed in, but before it is returned, a handout of typical grammar errors is prepared, composed of a sentence from each student's essay, again using the copywriting symbols to indicate errors. The students correct these in small groups, then different versions (there is more than one possible correction) are put on the board and analysed for correctness, style, and inclusion of all information. As this handout can be fairly long, it is often worked on for half an hour at a time over two or three periods. This grammar work is interactive not only because students are in small groups, but because the author is frequently appealed to (if he/she doesn't want anonymity) to clarify meaning. In addition, native speakers of English can provide valuable help if the assignment is finished as homework. In the following handout the nature of the assignment elicited many adverb clauses. The grammar handout more typically, however, contains various errors, or sentence structure errors such as short sentences to be combined, sentence fragments or run-on sentences.

HANDOUT #9 GRAMMAR ERRORS- ADVERB CLAUSES

IN SMALL GROUPS, CORRECT ALL ERRORS SHOWN AND IDENTIFY ADVERB CLAUSES.

1. Last week I went to the East Canyon trail because one of my best friends told me about the beautifuly F experance SP that he hasT in that place.

2. (^East Canyon field trip it was) SS a good experience for me because I saw a lot of things.

3. Last Wednesday, as the weather was very clear, we had V a walk at PREP East Canyon trail.

4. (At first I entered East Canyon Trail)SS , (where was ^ big rain forest)SS, I felt so cold.

5. (It was a big surprise for me that I could see) SS such a natural rain forest near a city, because hardly any rain forest has been remained A/P in Korea.

To some degree, all choices of error symbols are arbitrary; for example, in #5, the error symbol A/P could as easily be V, with a correction then of "has been kept"

rather than "has remained". It is precisely these issues which are informative to the students, however, and one of the reasons for having each group put their version on the board. Another point of interest in #5 is the SS mistake--not technically wrong, but to my ears wordy and unidiomatic. If a less advanced student had written it, I might not have asked for any change. It is also important to note in focusing on errors that even the inclusion of a sentence from each students' work might not prevent initial embarrassment, so either on the handout or in class, something positive about each sentence is commented on, or elicited from the class; eg,length, complexity, vocabulary, sentiment, or humour.

In any sort of composition, introductions and conclusions are worthy of attention. Using the students productions, there are several ways to teach these. One way is, before the students have handed in their work, to hand around a couple of sheets of paper and ask each student to write his first and last sentence. (This can be done on the same or on separate sheets.) These are then copied and students are asked to choose their favourites and to justify the choice. Another method is to prepare a handout of my choices, and have students guess my reasons for preference, such as attention-getters that state the topic in the case of introductions, and summaries of the experience, projecting to the future, humour or expressiveness in the conclusions.

HANDOUT # 10 EXCELLENT INTRODUCTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS
COMBINE SENTENCES WHERE NECESSARY.

INTRODUCTIONS

1. If you go to some beautiful viewpoints at UBC, you will find yourself in your dream.

2. I would like to convey you to a beautiful viewpoint which is located behind the Anthropology Museum .

3. (We had a field trip in the writing class under the lovely sun. I had a lot of sensations on this field trip. I will try to express some of the strongest impressions.)C

CONCLUSIONS

1. This will remain in my memory as a wonderful field trip.

2. I'd like to visit there again with my boyfriend or when I have died of a broken heart.

3. (If you want to melt into the silence, you should go there. Maybe you will be content.)C

Organizational techniques in longer compositions can be taught, not by a handout but by having the students prepare a post-outline after the first draft. They can do this for their own work or for another student. Each paragraph is numbered and a brief description of its contents is listed. In this way overlappings, repetitions, omissions and other organizational flaws become apparent. The rewrites, interestingly, as often become longer as shorter.

It is worth noting that although all of the handouts in this paper have used examples from various field trips, these have been drawn from several courses. It is not advisable to use many handouts from a single composition, but rather to do a couple of handouts from each compostion assignment, to avoid boredom. After the students' papers have been checked (no grades are assigned as these are non-credit courses), the papers are returned and students begin their rewriting, which includes not only correcting grammar errors, but such changes as may have been learned from the handouts, including organizational changes, and vocabulary and style improvement. All changes are underlined before being handed back in. Lots of class time is given to writing and rewriting, while the handouts and supplementary exercises are homework. Usually a next prewritng activity has started before all the students have finished rewriting. Students are given a choice at this point of working alone, with a partner of their choice or in groups. As they become more comfortable with peer critiquing they become more eager to read each others' work and to have an audience for their own. After their rewritten papers have been checked again (at this point any problems are corrected rather than indicated with symbols), students rewrite only those parts which need changing, unless they've chosen the composition for publication in our book, where a perfect copy is required. Some of these corrected papers are copied for class reading, either by the whole class or circulated amongst samall groups. Usually it is helpful for a student to read the paper aloud while the others follow by reading the copy. Encouraged by the teacher's asking of what is "good" in each paper, the class quickly becomes generous in spontaneous praise, recognizing improvement in the less advanced and granting recognition to the better writers.

The standard components of a grammar-based or functional composition curriculum; ie. organization, vocabulary improvement, sentence structure and combining, verb tense sequence and transitional words are addressed in each course, as students' needs are predicably within these

general areas, but they are not taught step-by-step, but in a circular mode, looked at again and again with each assignments' handouts. In this way, the needs of a multi-level class are met while continuing students are not repeating material. Peer-critiquing leads to an increased ability to self-critique, and the interactive methods make the classroom a more warm and friendly place, with the students expressing an appreciation for each others' work. Having a wider audience for written work also motivates students to produce good work, an important consideration in an ungraded course. On the last day, when the students are busy autographing each others' books, (published on our copying machine and decorated by the class artist with photographs from the field trips) a real sense of accomplishment is felt.

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